Duncan Grant (1885-1978)



'Christ In Glory' by D.Grant 1941

The Chancel Arch

After Jesus had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven. Hebrews Ch1.v3

The mural depicts Christ, having offered Himself on the cross, now enthroned in heaven with angels worshipping Him. On the right of the Chancel arch are Bishop Bell (kneeling) and behind him the Rector of Berwick, Revd G.Mitchell. On the left are the kneeling figures of a soldier (Douglas Hemming, killed at Caen in 1944), a sailor (Mr Weller) and an airman (Mr Humphry). The painting portrays a hierarchy – the servicemen look to the Bishop who is kneeling in prayer. Christ's rule and victory over death is set over a country in the turmoil of a war. Poppies can be seen in the foreground symbolising remembrance and resurrection. Grant records the landscape and people of wartime England. He also portrays his patrons after the manner of Renaissance murals.





The Pulpit by D. Grant, 1962

Originally the three central panels of the pulpit portrayed the Saints Gabriel, Raphael and Michael by V. Bell. They were vandalised in 1962 and the panels repainted after her death by D. Grant to designs by Angelica Bell. The surviving narrow left-hand panel is by V. Bell, and the far-right panel is thought to be by Angelica Bell.



Original pulpit design by V. Bell.

The Chancel Screen by D. Grant 1944

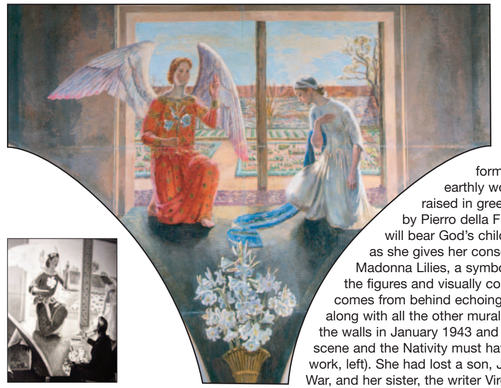
The four medallions on the screen and the two panels on the central doors illustrate the text from Genesis Ch.8 v.22 *As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will never cease'* This was God's promise to Noah after the Great Flood. 'Day and Night' features the pond at Charleston.



'Four Seasons' & 'Day and Night' by D.Grant,1944

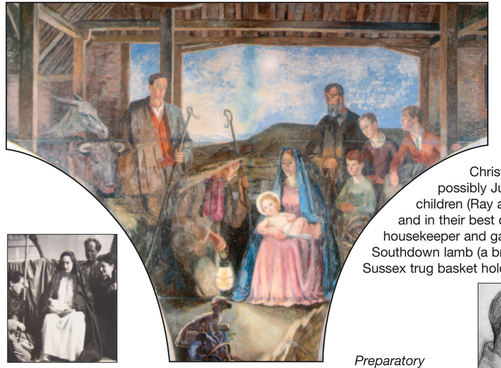
Vanessa Bell (1879-1961)

'The Annunciation' 1941 Nave, south wall



Angelica Bell, daughter of D. Grant and V. Bell, was the model for Mary. Her friend, Chattie Salaman posed for the angel Gabriel. This image is reminiscent of a Renaissance Annunciation. The walled garden with its ordered beds behind is based on that at Charleston Farmhouse. The lilies symbolise Mary's virginity. The flowers on the fruit tree in the garden indicate it is spring. The figures are inside a room. A wooden pillar supporting a 'cloistered' walkway outside separates them and forms a symbolic boundary between the heavenly and earthly world. Gabriel, in red, with strong neck and a hand raised in greeting, forms a strong proclamatory figure (like those by Pierro della Francesca).Gabriel brings the message that Mary will bear God's child. Mary humbly kneels and bows her covered head as she gives her consent to God's will *'May it be to me as you have said'*. Madonna Lilies, a symbol of Mary, are placed on a painted shelf beneath the figures and visually connected to Mary by a flowing blue shawl. The light comes from behind echoing the natural source of light in the building. This along with all the other murals is painted onto plasterboard. They were fixed to the walls in January 1943 and dedicated by Bishop Bell in October 1943. This scene and the Nativity must have been poignant for Vanessa (photographed at work, left). She had lost a son, Julian, three years previously in the Spanish Civil War, and her sister, the writer Virginia Woolf, had recently taken her own life.

'The Nativity' 1941 Nave, north wall



Left to right: Duncan Grant, Angelica and Quentin Bell and Chattie Salaman.

The barn in the nativity is a Sussex Barn at Tilton and through the opening is a view to Mount Caburn. The models for the shepherd, far left, and Joseph, behind Mary, each had only one arm. The shepherds on the left hold 'Pyecombe' crooks. The one kneeling carries a lamp symbolising Jesus as *'the true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world'* John Ch.1 v.8. The infant Christ is very similar to pictures of Quentin Bell (and possibly Julian) as a baby. Angelica Bell posed for Mary. The children (Ray and Bill West and John Higgins), with hair combed and in their best clothes (school uniform) are those of the housekeeper and gardener at Charleston. In the foreground is a Southdown lamb (a breed developed by Ellman's grandfather) and a Sussex trug basket holding vegetables.







Preparatory sketches for 'The Nativity' by V.Bell.

Quentin Bell (1910-1996)

Quentin Bell, son of Vanessa and Clive Bell, undertook all the paintings within the Chancel as well as *'The Supper at Emmaus'* at the east end of the north aisle.



'The Wise and Foolish Virgins' by Q.Bell. 1941



'The Supper at Emmaus' by Q. Bell. 1944

In 'The Supper at Emmaus' the risen Jesus appears to two disciples on their way to Emmaus. They do not recognise Him until the moment He takes bread and breaks it. It is this moment of revelation which is depicted. The models of the two disciples were men of the Australian Air Force quartered in Sussex during the war. Leonard Woolf, husband of Virginia Woolf, is said to have posed for Jesus.





On the rear of the Chancel screen are 'The Sacraments', by Quentin Bell portraying the 'Cycle of Life'. From left to right; Baptism, Confirmation, Holy Matrimony, Last Rites. On the door panels are Repentance and Communion. Q. Bell's medallions have a distinctly Victorian feel to them.

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St Michael & All Angels, Berwick, East Sussex
www.berwickchurch.org.uk





A Guide to the Church and 20th Century Bloomsbury Murals



Introduction

Berwick church is a Grade 1 listed building of great importance on account of its unique 20th Century murals painted during the Second World War by the Bloomsbury artists, Duncan Grant, Vanessa Bell and Quentin Bell.



The panoramic view of The South Downs to Firle Beacon from 100m south of the church.

A Short History

The site is on a rise in land with **panoramic views** of the South Downs both to the east and the west.

As one enters the church one can see through the single window beyond the font the grassy bank of a **barrow** (mound) which indicates the pre-historic origin of this sacred site.



Saxon font

The simple well-like early **Saxon font** appears to predate the later 12th Century building around it. To the right of the font on the lower stones of the tower arch can be seen 14th Century **arrow marks**, grooves thought to have been cut by the sharpening of arrows. Archery practice was made compulsory on a Sunday after church by Edward III. The 'Westcatts of Berwick' are on the Rolls of Archers at Agincourt and 'Westgates' still live in the parish. The tower was built in 1603 and at that time had a spire. The south aisle whose pillar and arches date back to the 14th Century were also restored at this time. The 17th Century **'Parson Nutt Memorial'**, (Rector of Berwick 1613-1645) on the north wall in the tower is largely hidden by the organ. He wrote a unique commonplace book 'Remembrances of the Parsons of Berwick'. Mrs Nutt gave a precious silver gilt chalice and patten as a thank offering for the birth of twins in 1633. The framed list of Rectors in the South Aisle records that *'a Parliamentarian intruder put in by Cromwell'* displaced Nutt at the Reformation (1649-1660) and he withdrew to his private home at Mays, Selmeston. Parson Nutt is buried in a vault before the altar. Still recovering from the Reformation in the 17th and 18th Centuries the church suffered from neglect. The 19th Century watercolour shows the east-end of the church was shortened and the roof thatched. The spire, which was destroyed by lightning on Aug 8th, 1773 is missing. There is no north aisle as it had been demolished in 1743.



Arrow marks



19th Century watercolour of Berwick Church

Debts on the building must have been heavy as a Church Rate was made in 1777. The selling of three of four bells (one bell dated 1629 was rehung) led to the saying *'The Parson poor and so was the people, so they sold the bells to repair the steeple'*. Later a small tolling-in bell, inscribed 1781, was purchased from a ship-wreck in 1811.

Revd E. Boys Ellman and the Victorian Restoration

Revd E. Boys Ellman was Curate of Berwick 1837-1843 and Rector 1846-1906, a ministry of a remarkable 66 years. He studied at Oxford where he was taught by the founders of the 'Oxford Movement', a Movement which restored Catholic elements to Anglican worship such as the importance of symbols, beauty, colour and the sacraments. Revd Boys Ellman is known for his book *'Recollections of a Sussex Parson'*, a remarkable account of his era. He described parts of the church as a 'rabbit warren' on his arrival. He built a new Rectory (1846) (adjacent to the church), a school (1854) (the flint building at the mini roundabout just down the lane), and also undertook the restoration of the church to designs by the local Victorian architect, **Henry Woodyer**. A Church Rate with special intent for the restoration was made for three years and the Diocese and friends contributed. The building was completed in 1857. In the rebuilding of the north aisle Woodyer designed the innovative, **'north arcade couple shaft'**. The east end of the church was extended and completely rebuilt.



Revd E. Boys Ellman





The Clear glass of North and South Aisles

The clear glass is a distinctive feature of the church. The Victorian plain leaded windows were damaged by bombs on Oct 17th 1944. Uncertain as to whether there would be further damage and because of the cost, plate glass was inserted.

The South Aisle

The **stained glass** above the altar at the east end of the South Aisle is in memory of Revd Boys Ellman's wife, Georgina, and shows two women from the New Testament Phoebe and Dorcas and above them the Virgin and Child. The 14th Century window adjacent to the Lady altar may have been the original East window moved at the time of restoration.



The altar was consecrated in memory of Revd A. Roe, Rector 1928-1934 and made by The Craftsman Guild, Kennington.

Detail from South Aisle window of Virgin & child

The Chancel

At the time of the Victorian restoration timbers from the roof were used to make the chancel screen and a new altar. The screen was painted in the 20th Century as part of the mural project. The altar steps are made from the old **Sussex marble altar** which was probably dismantled at the Reformation and found in the chancel floor. The stone has also been incorporated into the back of the **Sedilia** (double seat to the right of the altar) and the Easter Sepulchre. The east end was rebuilt and extended. The beautifully carved **14th Century Easter Sepulchre** (to the left of the altar) was discovered in pieces in the churchyard and reincorporated during the reconstruction. The cross at its top was probably the old external cross from the east end of the roof. The Easter Sepulchre represents the tomb in which Jesus was buried and was used to retell the story of the resurrection. Consecrated bread was wrapped in white linen and placed there on Good Friday with a cross. Early on Easter morning only the linen would remain. Parishioners coming to the Sepulchre would be met by the Priest dressed in white and be asked 'Whom seek ye?'. When they answered 'Jesus of Nazareth' the priest would respond 'He is not here: He is risen! Come, see the place where Jesus lay'. And going to the Sepulchre and seeing linen cloth they would exclaim 'Alleluia! The Lord is risen indeed, Allelulia!' and worship would begin.The three **stained glass windows** in the Chancel were given in memory of Revd.J.Walker, son-in-law to Revd Boys Ellman, and portray St Wilfrid, founder of Chichester Diocese, St Richard a former Bishop and St Dunstan a former Archbishop of Canterbury. The **altar frontal** was designed by Duncan Grant and worked by his mother.



Easter Sepulchre 14th Century



(Left) St Wilfrid, (634-709 A.D.)

(Middle) St Richard, (1197-1253)

(Right) St Dustan, (909-988 A.D.)

The East Window





The East Window is in memory of Revd Boys Ellman. It was made by Whitefriars and installed in 1908. Central is the risen Christ dressed in priests' vestments, with hands raised in blessing and showing the wounds on His palms and feet. Beneath His feet is 'living water'. Behind Him is 'the tree of life' and through this the 'heavenly Jerusalem'. The window portrays the heavenly realm (see below) as described in the Book of Revelation,





and the earthly realm with Jesus, the mediator, between the two. Mary is seen to the left holding lilies, next to her is John the Baptist and Nicodemus who took Jesus' body and placed it in a tomb. On the right are Peter holding 'the keys to the kingdom' James with a chalice and John holding a sword. At the very top is a portrayal of St Michael.

And He…showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel…It had a great, high wall with twelve angels at the gates…Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit…and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. Revelation Ch.21v.10, Ch.22 v.1-2.

The 20th Century Murals



Bishop Bell of Chichester, mural sketch by D.Grant

Before the Reformation even some of the small rural Downland churches, such as the one at Clayton (see below), had extensive murals. **Bishop Bell of Chichester** wanted to revive this tradition. In 1941 he wrote to his friend Sir Charles Reilly, a neighbour of Duncan Grant's aunt and who was familiar with previous mural work; *I know that you will rejoice to hear that the plan you suggested of getting Duncan Grant to do a mural for one of the old Sussex churches is coming about…'*. Berwick was going to be a great experiment and a catalyst for promoting the relationship between the Arts and the Church. In 1941 Sir Kenneth Clarke wrote; *'…with a little judicious publicity it might have the effect of encouraging other dioceses to do the same. If once such a movement got under way, it would have incalculable influence for the good on English Art.* The 'experiment' received further support from Frederick Etchells who testified at the Consistory Court hearing regarding the project in 1941; *…this is a suitable case for an experiment because to all intents and purposes it is a modern church.*

Clayton church lies at the foot of the Downs north of Brighton. Its walls are covered with 11th Century murals. 'Christ in majesty' over the chancel arch presides within a central Mandorla, hands held out in blessing, flanked by two angels. The murals are framed by elaborate decorative borders. The Byzantine appearance is reflected in D. Grant's 'Christ in Glory'.





The Artists

Duncan Grant (1885-1978) was the lead artist for the murals and put forward the initial proposals. He moved with Vanessa Bell (sister of Virginia Woolf) to Charleston Farmhouse, at the foot of the Downs, three miles to the west, in 1916. His work is influenced by his travels in Italy where, with Vanessa Bell he had seen the mosaics at Ravenna and copied the frescoes of Piero della Francesca (1420-1492) at Arezzo.

Then in Paris he had copied works by Chardin (1699-1779) portraying scenes from everyday life, ordinary people in work or recreation. At the same time he studied the work of the Impressionists and was later greatly influenced by the Post-Impressionists such as Cezanne, Matisse, and others. Grant could be called a British Post-Impressionist for his style and use of bright colour. The murals at Berwick exhibit influences from all of these traditions, but also something of the artists' focus on the intimacy of the home and personal relationships and their love of the beauty and simplicity of the Downland landscape. In their 'Italianisation' of the church Grant and Bell painted panels on the east wall, some of the stonework and Renaissance circular windows either side of the nave murals. His sketches (right) show that he also wanted to paint the stonework of the arches but this was not allowed.







The Victory of Calvary
by D. Grant 1944 and preparatory sketch.

Christ is portrayed as willingly offering Himself; *for all time one sacrifice for sin Hebrews Ch.10.12.*, knowing that by His death He destroys death. His vision is heavenward, towards the light; *for the joy set before him endured the cross* Hebrews Ch.12 v.2. The panel outline is in the form of a chalice which in worship holds the wine symbolising the shedding of Christ's blood. The artist Edward Le Bas posed for the picture tied to an easel. Proportions of the body are distorted, as they are in 'Christ in Glory'. The legs and torso appear elongated, perhaps in the manner of 'El Greco'. He liked to emphasise the contrast between male and female forms, giving his women massively rounded torsos, arms and legs (see Christ in Glory).

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